

Sūrah 106

Quraysh (The Quraysh)

(Makkan Period)

Title

The opening word of the *Sūrah*, *Quraysh* also serves as its title.

Period of Revelation

Although Ḍaḥḥāk and Kalbī speak of it as a Madīnan *Sūrah*, the vast majority of Qur'ānic scholars regard it as Makkan. Verse 3 of this *Sūrah* constitutes the internal evidence for its Makkan origin. Had it been Madīnan, it could not contain the allusion, "the Lord of this House (the Ka'bah in Makkah)." In its theme too, it is closely linked with *Sūrah al-Fīl* and may have been revealed during the same period. Since both the *Sūrahs* have so much in common, some scholars take the two *Sūrahs* as one. This view gained some support in the light of the report that in Ubayy ibn Ka'ab's Qur'ān codex, both were written together, without the usual demarcation of *basmalah*. Moreover, 'Umar once recited both together, without any break. However, this view is not sound. The official Qur'ān codex prepared by 'Uthmān, with the active cooperation of a large

number of Companions, carries the usual line of demarcation between the two *Sūrahs*. Since then, to this day, these have been universally recognized as two independent *Sūrahs*. They also differ markedly in their style, leaving no doubt whatsoever that they are two separate *Sūrahs*.

Circumstantial Setting

A study of its circumstantial setting is essential for both its better appreciation and for grasping its thematic affinity with *Sūrah al-Fīl*.

Until the era of Quṣayy ibn Kilāb, the Prophet's ancestor, the Quraysh were scattered across Ḥijāz. He gathered them together in Makkah and ultimately gained the custodianship of the Ka'bah. He, therefore, earned the title of *muja'amma* (the gatherer). Gifted with statesman like qualities, he established Makkah as a city state and provided excellent facilities for pilgrims from all parts of Arabia. Gradually the Quraysh earned the respect of all the tribes in the region. After Quṣayy's death, his sons, 'Abd Manāf and 'Abd al-Dār, held coveted offices in the state of Makkah. Of the two, the former had gained greater fame even in his father's time and was held in much esteem by Arab tribes. 'Abd Manāf had four sons – Hāshim, 'Abd Shams, Muṭṭalib and Nawfal. Hāshim, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib's father and the Prophet's great grandfather, was the first to embark upon international trade on the route between the eastern regions and Syria and Egypt. This trade was to help meet local needs and of the tribesmen on the route. It would also attract traders to Makkah as a commercial centre. By that time, the Persian Empire enjoyed its monopoly over trade activities between the northern regions and parts of the Roman Empire and the eastern region through the Persian Gulf. Indeed, trade activities flourished on the route from south Arabia to the Red Sea coast on the way to Syria and Egypt. As compared to other Arab tribes, the Quraysh trade caravans enjoyed respect in their capacity as the custodians of the Ka'bah among all the Arab tribes living beside the route. As they used to extend lavish hospitality to pilgrims, everyone stood indebted to them. They did not apprehend any attack on their trade caravans. Nor did they have to pay exorbitant toll taxes, to which

other tribes were subject. With an eye on all these factors, Hāshim drew up his plan for trade, in partnership with his three brothers. They secured trade facilities and concessions from the rulers of Ghassān, Abyssinia, Yemen and Iraq. Their trade had roaring success and they were widely acclaimed as businessmen. They were known as the people of *al-īlāf* (literally, those who promote love) in recognition of their contacts and pacts with neighbouring tribes and states.

Thanks to this trade activity, the Quraysh developed contacts with people from Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Yemen and Abyssinia. This exposure raised their social status and they grew in maturity and insight, without any competing Arab tribe. They were the richest in Arabia and Makkah turned into a hub of business and trade. As a result of their interaction with the Iraqis, they learnt the script in which the Qur'ān was written at a later date. The Quraysh was the most literate tribe. For all of these accomplishments, the Prophet (peace be upon him) branded them as leaders of people, (Ahmad on the authority of 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ). Bayhaqī cites 'Alī's report that the Prophet (peace be upon him) remarked: "The Hīmayr tribe enjoyed the leadership of the Arabs. Then Allah took it away from them and bestowed it on the Quraysh."

While the Quraysh had been recording all-round advances, they faced Abrahah's attack. Had Abrahah been successful in demolishing the Ka'bah, both the Quraysh and the Ka'bah would have lost their long-standing prestige. Belief in the Ka'bah as the House of God, entertained throughout the *Jāhiliyyah* period, would have been shaken. The Quraysh too, would have lost their privileged status of being the Ka'bah's custodians. Once the Abyssinians had established their control over Makkah, the Romans would have captured the trade route between Syria and Makkah. This would have hit the Quraysh economy badly, reducing them to paupers, as they had been in the past. However, as Allah miraculously saved the Ka'bah and destroyed the Abyssinian army, the members of which collapsed all the way from Makkah to Yemen, it renewed, rather fortified the Arabs' belief in the Ka'bah as the House of God. By the same token, it reaffirmed the prestige and glory of the Quraysh. Other Arabs realized that the Quraysh enjoyed Allah's special favour. The Quraysh fearlessly traversed

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the whole region along with their trade caravans and no one dared molest them. Even non-Quraysh Arabs under their care enjoyed the same protection.

Theme

These incidents were fresh in public memory when the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) appeared on the scene. The *Sūrah*, therefore, does not delve deeply into these historical details. Rather, its four succinct verses address the Quraysh directly, reminding them that since they recognize the Ka'bah as the House of God, and not a pantheon of idols, and since they acknowledge that they enjoy peace and security because of their association with the Ka'bah, they must worship only the One True God. They also owe their flourishing trade, their protection against starvation and their prosperity only to the Ka'bah, and its Lord, the One True God.